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Bad Deal For Berrellez

THE courts will decide whether Robert Berrellez committed perjury and obstructed the investigation of a multinational corporation when he testified before a Senate subcommittee.

But it doesn't require a judicial hearing to realize that someone is out to make an example of Berrellez as a big bad American businessman who meddled in the internal affairs of a foreign government.

Berrellez works for the International Telephone and Telegraph Co. He was in Latin America for years and now is the company's public relations director in the Southwest.

Born in Nogales, he was educated in Arizona. He decided to become a newspaperman and went to work for the Associated Press in Phoenix. Bilingual, knowledgeable, able, he became a roving correspondent for the AP with headquarters in Mexico City. He was in Cuba when Fidel Castro came to power, and spent six months in jail for the crime of being an American newsman.

If Berrellez is found guilty in his trial in Washington, he may go to jail for having been an American businessman who helped the Central Intelligence Agency while he was living abroad.

It is generally admitted that the CIA helped remove Salvador Allende as head of a Marxist government in Chile. Congressmen have been kicking the matter around

for years; and liberals have done their best to persuade the world that the CIA secretly sought to depose communism in every government in the world before it was tripped up, along with the FBI, at Watergate.

Back in 1973 several ITT officials, including Berrellez, were questioned about the alleged collaboration between the company and the CIA with the intention of influencing the outcome of an election in Chile.

The material unearthed by the Senate committee was submitted by the Justice Department to a federal grand jury in Washington. No indictments were returned. But on March 20 of this year, one day before the statute of limitations would have made it impossible to charge Berrellez with his alleged crimes, the department filed an information against him.

The trial has started, and probably will drag on for week after dreary week.

Without predicting the outcome, we do think it was unconscionable of the prosecutorial arm of the U.S. government to have waited so long to file charges if it had any kind of a case at all.

And we think it would be dangerous to the security of the United States if American businessmen living abroad reached the conclusion that they could not talk to American intelligence officers without ending up in federal court.